

# From *Street...*

  
Stormwater  
Athens-Clarke County



# S to *Stream*

**Protecting Our Classic Resource**



A photograph of a river flowing through a dense forest. The water is a light blue-grey color, and the surrounding trees are lush green. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking down the river.

## What is Stormwater?

**S**tormwater is exactly what it sounds like. It is the water that falls during a storm. It sounds simple enough. But what most people don't realize is that in the journey from the sky to streets to the streams, stormwater runoff picks up various chemicals and pollutants that can contaminate our waterways.

Although known as the “Classic City,” Athens-Clarke County is an area in constant growth and change. Areas that were forests or pastures are now thriving urban centers. The buildings, streets, and parking lots that come along with development and modern growth are impervious to rainwater. As a result, the rainwater that once soaked directly into the ground, now runs off streets and rooftops and causes a myriad of stormwater problems.



## A T H E N S - C L A R K E C O U N T Y S T O R M W A T E R



### Did You Know?

*Trash and debris from the street are washed directly into our local waterways.*

## The Need for Stormwater Management

**T**he excess stormwater runoff that falls onto impervious surfaces eventually makes its way to the Middle and North Oconee Rivers. Along the way, this stormwater runoff picks up chemicals, debris, and other contaminants that pollute the rivers. Stormwater runoff can also erode the soil and riverbanks, adversely affecting our environment and altering the daily life of Athens-Clarke residents.

The water that pours onto the street from a downpour rushes off the road and into a stormdrain. Proper drainage ensures that streets are safe to travel and protects property from flooding. That drain—and the system that it connects to - must be maintained and upgraded, to protect our homes and businesses from the potential problems that can come from stormwater runoff.

Those who have lived in Athens for any period of time can remember driving down Lumpkin or Baxter Street and coming to a halt because of excess rainwater standing in the roadway. Problems such as these seem fairly innocuous until flooding closes a business owner's doors or your family is unable to reach the hospital in an emergency. That's when stormwater problems become a hindrance to you and your community.

For these reasons, the federal and state governments have required that towns the size of Athens-Clarke County manage stormwater according to certain guidelines. In response to these new regulations, Athens-Clarke County has created a comprehensive stormwater management program. This program extends beyond existing stormwater services and works to alleviate problems caused by years of deterioration to the stormwater infrastructure of Athens-Clarke County, while making sure that we are prepared for all that the future holds.





## A T H E N S - C L A R K E C O U N T Y S T O R M W A T E R

### The Benefits of Your Stormwater Program

**T**he issue of stormwater management affects everyone in Athens-Clarke County. We all contribute to the stormwater problems in our community. Even if your property has never had a drainage problem, the stormwater runoff that comes from your rooftop, driveway, or parking lot must be managed to prevent flooding in areas further downstream.

Just as we all contribute to the stormwater system, we all will receive benefits of stormwater management. Those benefits are many, including:



- ~~~~~ Improved water quality
- ~~~~~ Federal and state permit compliance
- ~~~~~ Improved infrastructure, safety, and security
- ~~~~~ Improved quality of life
- ~~~~~ Smart, quality growth

#### ~~~~~ Improved Water Quality

Polluted stormwater runoff that flows from parking lots, streets, driveways, yards, and rooftops ends up in our streams and rivers untreated. These same streams and rivers supply our community with the raw water that is processed to become drinking water.

The ACC Stormwater Management Program will help reduce the pollutants that enter our streams and rivers through stormwater discharges. Keeping our rivers and streams free of harmful contaminants lessens the burden that is placed on the county drinking water and treatment facilities, making the water you drink the cleanest and safest available.





## A T H E N S - C L A R K E C O U N T Y S T O R M W A T E R



### Did You Know?

*Chemicals such as oil  
and antifreeze that  
drip from parked  
cars flow into our  
rivers and streams*

### ~~~~~ Federal Permit Compliance

Just as we as residents have laws we must abide by in order to have a safe and cohesive country, local governments have laws, or mandates, they must abide by as well. One of those is the Clean Water Act. The act was ratified "... to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters." This act ensures that residents can be confident that their local communities are working diligently to protect the waters in their area.

The Clean Water Act has been working to protect our nation's waters for more than thirty years and continues to change and evolve over time. In 2001, Athens-Clarke County was designated as a Phase II community under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) rule of the Clean Water Act. This rule is administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD).

The designation as a Phase II community required Athens-Clarke County to develop a stormwater management program addressing six key areas:



1. **Public education**
2. **Public involvement in the stormwater program**
3. **Elimination of unlawful discharges**
4. **Controls on new construction**
5. **Post-construction management of stormwater runoff**
6. **Implementation of good housekeeping activities for municipal operations**

By working proactively, the Athens-Clarke County Government is taking the extra steps needed to guarantee that they are in compliance with these regulations and that the stormwater problems of Athens-Clarke County are not being left for our children to fix.





## A T H E N S - C L A R K E C O U N T Y S T O R M W A T E R

### ~~~~~ **Enhanced quality of life**

Many Athens-Clarke County residents have fond memories of playing in and around the Oconee River as children. Unfortunately, as the area has grown, the health of the river has declined. As a result, many of the activities that were once taken for granted—swimming and fishing for example—are now in jeopardy due to the poor condition of the river.

Poor stormwater management can lead to destruction of the ecosystem. Urban pollutants, such as bacteria, sediment, oil and grease, heavy metals, pesticides, fertilizers and trash, are flushed from our roadways, parking lots, and yards, into the river, severely disrupting this fragile system.

By educating the public on these issues, as well as making capital improvements to the stormwater system, the Athens-Clarke County Stormwater Management Program is working to ensure that as Athens-Clarke County matures, the quality of life of its residents does not suffer.

### ~~~~~ **Protected quality growth**

Although situated in one of the smallest counties in the nation, Athens-Clarke County has encountered unprecedented growth in recent years. In order to accommodate this growth, stormwater must be properly managed to provide protection of our water resources, which have been pumping the lifeblood into our county since its founding over 200 years ago.

By adopting a new Stormwater Management Ordinance, Athens-Clarke County policymakers have established pre-construction standards for developers so property designs can begin to incorporate sensitivity for long-term environmental stewardship. Pre-application meetings will be conducted between developers and Athens-Clarke County staff to eliminate surprises in the permitting process as it relates to stormwater management. These measures and more will provide for quality growth in the bustling Athens-Clarke County area.





## A T H E N S - C L A R K E C O U N T Y S T O R M W A T E R



### Did You Know?

*Pet waste that is not  
disposed of properly  
can contaminate  
local waters.*

## Sharing the Cost of Stormwater Management

**T**he increased stormwater services mandated by the federal and state governments require about \$1.4 million in additional funding. The Athens-Clarke County Stormwater Advisory Committee has recommended that stormwater services be funded through a stormwater utility fee. Much like water or sewer fees, a stormwater utility charges customers based on the need for service.

The establishment of a utility allows the ACC Government to legally and fairly assess fees based on the quantity and quality of the water that runs off of a given property. A stormwater utility only collects fees necessary to fund local operations and maintenance of the stormwater system. These dedicated funds are used only for stormwater related projects and nothing else.

Other funding options have been considered but were not found to be an equitable distribution of stormwater costs. One option, raising the tax rate, charges all properties in the county a similar rate, regardless of on-site stormwater controls or how the property is developed. Also, some contributors to stormwater runoff, including schools, churches, and government buildings' are tax-exempt and would not pay their share of stormwater costs through property taxes. These tax-exempt properties would pay a stormwater utility fee just as they also pay water and sewer utility fees.

As proven in cities all over the country, a utility is the fairest and most reliable way to fund stormwater programs and provides our community with an alternative to cutting existing government services or raising property taxes.





## A T H E N S - C L A R K E C O U N T Y S T O R M W A T E R

### Getting the Most for Your Stormwater Dollars

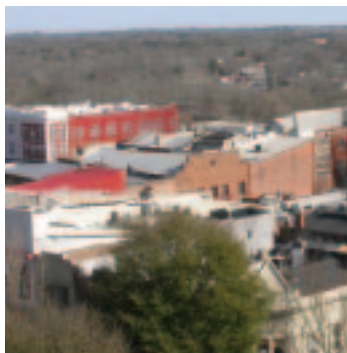
**T**he question most will ask is, “What am I getting for my money?” The stormwater utility fee will pay for the operations and maintenance costs of the stormwater program. Some of the services tied to the stormwater program include:

- ~~~~~ Flood protection through capital improvement projects
- ~~~~~ Improved water quality through watershed protection
- ~~~~~ Maintenance of drainage infrastructure
- ~~~~~ Stormdrain cleaning and repair
- ~~~~~ Street sweeping
- ~~~~~ Pipe Cleaning
- ~~~~~ Shoulder and ditch maintenance within the right of way
- ~~~~~ Education and outreach to improve public understanding
- ~~~~~ Construction inspections to assure proper site management
- ~~~~~ Project design and management
- ~~~~~ Federal and state regulatory compliance
- ~~~~~ Improved long-term stormwater planning
- ~~~~~ Increased oversight of new development





## A T H E N S - C L A R K E C O U N T Y S T O R M W A T E R



### Did You Know?

*Most stormwater pollution  
is preventable.*

## A Classic Community Protected and Proud

**C**urrently, Athens-Clarke County provides a variety of stormwater management services. In fact, ACC Stormwater was recently recognized for excellence by the Georgia Water & Pollution Control Association as the Georgia Water & Pollution Control Association's 2003 Stormwater Management Program of the Year.

The establishment of a utility will allow Athens-Clarke County to expand its stormwater services in a way that meets federal and state requirements, protects our natural resources, and provides for the unique needs of the Athens-Clarke community for years to come.

The implementation of the Athens-Clarke County Stormwater Utility will assure that the problems of today are not passed down to future generations. From street to stream, the Athens-Clarke County Stormwater Utility is working to protect our most classic resource.



**FROM STREET TO STREAM**  
**Protecting Our Classic Resource**

For more information, please write us at:  
**120 W. Dougherty Street ■ P.O. Box 1868**  
**Athens, Georgia 30603**

call us at:  
**706.613.3440**

or visit our website at:  
**[accstormwater.com](http://accstormwater.com)**







120 W. Dougherty Street  
P.O. Box 1868  
Athens, Georgia 30603



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